Executive Summary

Employment of Optometric Staff

Purpose

Employment of Optometric Staff is derived from the 2012 Survey of Optometric Practice, the intent of which is to gather key information about optometric practice characteristics, such as number and frequency of patient visits, hours worked by optometrists and optometric staff, as well as gross billings, expenses and income. This report focuses on the employment of non-optometrist staff in the optometry practice. Optometric staff positions analyzed include: clinical staff, optical dispensing staff, optical laboratory staff, coding & billing personnel, secretary/receptionists, office managers, and financial coordinators. Results are presented for all owners, solo, non-solo owners and employed optometrists. The Executive Summary aims to provide an overview of survey results.

Optometric Staff in Optometry Practices

In 2011, the most commonly employed optometric staff positions among all practices were clinical staff, followed by optical dispensing staff. As seen in Figure 1, two thirds of responding optometry practices (66%) employed optometric staff for clinical positions and 64% employed optical dispensing staff. Dedicated secretary/receptionist positions were the third most frequently reported staff position with 62% of practices employing this position. Nine out of ten (91%) optometry practices reported employment of non-optometrist staff in 2011 either on a full-time or part-time basis. Among all practices, 86% employed optometric staff on a full-time basis and 56% employed part-time staff. The number of optometric staff per optometrist is similar for all practices (3.4 staff) and for only those practices that employed optometric staff in 2011 (3.7 staff). Optometrists who were members of the AOA reported employing, on average, one more staff member per optometrist (4.2) than non-members who employed 3.0 staff per optometrist.

U.S. Census Region & CPC Certification

Optometry practices located in the southern region of the U.S. employed the most optometric staff in 2011 with an average of 3.9 staff per optometrist, as seen in Figure 2. Practices located in the western region employed the fewest staff, averaging 2.8 per optometrist. Optometrists in the Midwest reported the highest percentage of AOA paraoptometric section members among their staff at 39% and the Northeast reported the highest percentage of optometric staff that were certified (14%) by the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) in 2011. Just over a third of responding optometrists (34%) believe that CPC certified optometric staff improves patient care. Nearly a third of optometrists believe that CPC certified staff also improve patient education (31%) and 29% believe CPC certified staff increase patient satisfaction. These results are higher than both 2009 and 2010 reports.
Clinical Staff

Clinical staff perform duties such as obtaining patient histories, pretesting patients, measuring visual acuity, and glaucoma screening. In 2011, 66% of optometrists reported employing at least one clinical staff member either on a full-time or part-time basis. The average number of clinical staff employed in all practices was one position per optometrist, as seen in Figure 3. The average hourly salary of clinical staff in all practices was $14, an 8% decrease from 2010. Clinical staff in the Midwest received the highest hourly pay, with an average of $16 per hour, and those employed in the South had the lowest hourly salary of $13. Among all clinical staff, 39% were members of the AOA paraoptometric section and 14% were certified by the CPC.

Optical Dispensing Staff

Optical dispensing staff ensure that the optometrist’s recommendations and specifications are met and that frames and lenses best suit the prescription and lifestyle needs of the patient. At 64%, optical dispensing staff were the second most commonly reported staff position in practices in 2011. The average number of optical dispensing staff in all practices was 0.8 positions per optometrist, as seen in Figure 4. The average hourly salary was $20 per hour in 2011, a 19% increase from 2010. Optical dispensing positions in the West region of the U.S. received the highest average hourly salary at $27, and those employed in the Midwest region received the lowest at $15. Responding optometrists reported that 34% of optical dispensing staff were members of the AOA paraoptometric section and 18% were certified by the CPC.

Optical Laboratory Staff

Optical laboratory staff may perform duties such as frame repairs, lens finishing, surfacing and coating. Optical laboratory positions were the second least employed staff position in practices during 2011 at 28%. The average number of optical laboratory personnel among all practices was 0.2 per optometrist, as seen in Figure 5. The average hourly wages were $17. Optical laboratory staff earned the highest hourly wages in the Northeast during 2011 at $22, and those in the South earned the least at $16. Among all reported optical laboratory staff, 35% were members of the AOA paraoptometric section and 26% were certified by the CPC.
Employment of Optometric Staff

Coding & Billing and Secretary/Receptionist Staff

Fifty percent of practices in 2011 employed staff for coding and billing services. The average number of staff per optometrist was 0.4. The average hourly salary among all practices was $17. Coding and billing staff located in the West region earned the highest hourly salary at $22 and those in the Midwest earned the lowest at $15 per hour.

Secretary/receptionist staff were employed in 62% of optometry practices. The average number of staff was 0.7 per optometrist. The average hourly wages of secretary/receptionist staff among all practices in 2011 was $13. Optometrists in the Northeast region reported paying higher hourly wages to secretary/receptionist positions at $14 and those in the Midwest reported the lowest at $12 per hour.

Office Manager & Financial Coordinator Staff

Office managers were employed in 46% of practices in 2011. The average number of staff was 0.3 per optometrist. Office managers in all practices earned an average of $20 per hour.

Financial coordinators were the least employed staff position with 20% of optometry practices employing this position to handle financial and accounting duties within the office. The average number of financial coordinators was 0.1 per optometrist. Financial coordinators in all practices earned an average of $22 per hour. The number of optometrists reporting salary, hours worked, and weeks worked for office managers and financial coordinators was too small to allow for reliable statistical analysis by U.S. Census Region.

About the 2012 Survey of Optometric Practice

The 2012 Survey of Optometric Practice was conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA) Research and Information Center in April 2012. The survey collected information about private and corporate practice, and other practice types in which optometrists practiced during 2011. Respondents answered questions using information from the previous year of operation, not 2012. The 2012 Survey was sent to a random stratified sample of professionally active optometrists who had a valid address on file with the AOA or the state boards of optometry.

Results from the survey are being released in three volumes: 1) Income from Optometry, 2) Employment of Optometric Staff and 3) Practicing Optometrists and their Patients.

This report focuses on employment of non-optometrist staff in optometry practices. Reports available from Employment of Optometric Staff include a Detailed Analysis Report and an Optometry Report. The Detailed Analysis Report uses limited narrative with cross tabulation for further analysis. The Optometry Report is in narrative format. Reports may be purchased by contacting the AOA Order Department or by visiting the web site at: www.aoa.org/store.

Several limitations of this study should be noted: (1) optometrists were invited to complete a paper survey which was distributed by the U.S. Postal Service. Incorrect addresses or delays in delivering the survey instrument may have excluded doctors from participating in, or receiving, the survey. (2) Optometrists who chose to participate in this survey were self-selected, which may mean that the survey attracted responses from optometrists whose practices were doing exceptionally well.

For questions about this survey, or other surveys conducted by the AOA, please contact the Research & Information Center at: RIC@aoa.org